What is a complete sentence? It is not merely a group of words with a capital letter at the beginning and a period or question mark at the end. A complete sentence has three components:

1. A subject (the actor in the sentence)
2. A predicate (the verb or action), and
3. A complete thought (it can stand alone and make sense—it’s independent).

What is a fragment? A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence that lacks a subject, a verb, or both. Fragments that most students have trouble with, however, are dependent clauses—ones that have a subject and a verb—because they look like complete sentences, but they do not express a complete thought. They’re called “dependent” because they can’t stand on their own.

Dependent Clause Examples:
Because his car was in the shop (...What did he do?)
After the rain stops (...What then?)
When you finally take the test (...What will happen?)

How can you avoid fragments? Make sure your sentence has a subject, verb, and complete thought. Then, scan your sentences for subordinating conjunctions.

Example: John took the bus because his car was in the shop.

What are subordinating conjunctions? Subordinating conjunctions join two sentences together by making one sentence dependent of the other for a complete thought. Typically, if a subordinating conjunction is placed at the beginning of the sentence (as demonstrated above), then the sentence may become a fragment.
Examples of Subordinating Conjunctions:

Cause / Effect: because, since, so that
Comparison / Contrast: although, even though, though, whereas, while
Place & Manner: how, however, where, wherever
Possibility / Conditions: if, whether, unless
Relation: that, which, who
Time: after, as, before, since, when, whenever, while, until

What are run-on sentences? A run-on sentence has two complete sentences together in one sentence without separating them with punctuation. These are also called fused sentences.

Example: My favorite restaurant is Olive Garden it is very tasty.

This one sentence actually contains two complete sentences. But in the rush to get that idea out, this sentence was made incorrectly.

How do we fix a run-on sentence?

- You could use a semicolon:
  My favorite restaurant is Olive Garden; it is very tasty.

- You could use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):
  My favorite restaurant is Olive Garden, for it is very tasty.

- You could use a subordinating conjunction (see above):
  My favorite restaurant is Olive Garden because it is very tasty.

- You could make it into two separate sentences with a period in between:
  My favorite restaurant is Olive Garden. It is very tasty.

- You could use an em-dash (a long dash) for emphasis:
  My favorite restaurant is Olive Garden—it is very tasty.

- You CANNOT simply add a comma between the two sentences, or you’ll end up with what’s called a “comma splice.” Here’s an example of a comma splice:
  My favorite restaurant is Olive Garden, it is very tasty.